



## **Designing For the Multi Generation and Nuclear Family**

Not many years ago we as a society were classified in our housing as an integrated multi generational family unit. Beginning in the 1950's that type of family matrix started shifting to what we have been living with and classified as a more nuclear family unit. Confused? Let us explore these family classifications and understand how they relate to the home we inhabit.

Integrated multi generation families are simply just that, i.e. with multiple generations of the same family occupying the home. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, mother, father, several children and even their children in many family units were the "norm" in America during the years prior to the 1950's. The children in most families never ventured far from the "home place" often living out their lives, raising their family and retiring in the same county or city where they were born.

Starting in the 50's and 60's as a society we became more mobile and started the longer distance separation from the family core unit. Multi generation housing and the requirements for the home changed dramatically to meet the new dictates.

The nuclear family may consist of a mother and or father with or without children. This unit requires a completely different approach to designing their space. This family may be totally separated by many miles from their family core unit with other members of the family occasionally staying over for a short visit. This home's sheltering requirements will have a bedroom for mom and dad, possibly a bedroom for each child, and a bedroom for guests. One eating, kitchen area is the "norm" for this family. In most homes we have also evolved into one family gathering space. Very possibly an office space will be required for this family. The small house that we work with today must consider this space to expand and compress to respond to family needs as we define the space. The one thing that we as designers and homeowners overlook in many homes is to allow for considerations of separation, individual privacy, multi age level activity, and sound transfer. Let's explore the positive and indeed the negative of each classification and how it is related to the design of your home.

The separation issue is one of unique and very important consideration when exploring the family unit and the activities, ages, and personal priorities for each member. When interviewing a client prior to actually designing any part of the home, I ask each member of the family questions ranging from what type of food the family prepares and who the chef is most of the time. I make it a habit to explore the activities of each family member. Does the family entertain at home and with whom? The list of inquiries is extensive and when complete I will know much about how this family will live in the house during their daily routine. Separation of space doesn't mean that each member of the family has a separate room from which to isolate themselves. Simply stated a separation of activities i.e. watching television is not being interrupted with multiple other activities from different age groups such as a teenager practicing on the drums or a

similar activity. Creating separate areas within a home again doesn't mean more walls, rather a separation of distance and placement of the rooms.

Individual privacy can be a very daunting requirement when designing a smaller home, but most certainly achievable. The mom is my first target of questioning, as she normally multi-tasks much more than the other members of the family. She is usually going like a "house on fire" from the time she hits the floor until she falls into bed at the end of the day. I get tired just listening to their schedule and don't know how they continue daily. Considering the role of each family member and the level of activity each do on a daily routine is of paramount concern prior to putting "pen to paper."

The lady of the house in many homes simply doesn't have "her" space to simply rest, read and "revitalize". This space may be for her, the breakfast room, a space in the office nook, or even retiring to the master bedroom "alone." She needs this time and that special space to call her own. I have created a private nook off the master, separate space adjacent to the laundry, a tiny loft area complementing the stairwell, and many other "my space" areas. These important areas don't require great expense, just some creative thought and listening skills. I believe multi-level activities are mostly confined to the separation of the ages of the family unit and their personal lifestyle, age specific requirements, and social activities.

Take as an example a home of mother, father, two sons (11 and 9) and one daughter five; we can clearly see the personality and the required lifestyle each person contributes to the family matrix. The dad may be an engineer who likes to golf, participates with the boys sports, and wants a space to totally unwind after the workday ends.

The two boys probably share most of the same interests except the 11 year old needs separation from the 9 year old, and that's tough because they share the same bedroom and bathroom. According to the boys, the little "princess" has her own room and is enjoying "Calico Critters" and "American Girl" in her room and occasionally sharing these items all over the house. The children of this family are an integral part of the unit and all of their daily requirements must be designed to have a level of tranquility that each of us yearn for in our home.

The mother—Oh yes, I didn't forget her important role here; but I discussed briefly above her level of activity. After all, she's going like a "house on fire" and engaging with each person in their room, pushing each one out the door well prepared for their day. Fortunately or unfortunately, many mom's are also heading out the door to pursue their career and add to the income. This is more the "norm" today and another important consideration for this very important family member. Okay guys, you are an "extremely" important family member too; but I challenge you to swap roles for two weeks. Let me assure you it's brutal and an adventure few men want to take on!

You are probably questioning how all of these subjects of thought process onto the drawing board and eventually make up the space allocation of your home. Simply put, each question answered to these and many more subjects are all parts to the whole. The exploration of each family member and the lifestyle each want to enjoy daily are all very important to how your home will live.

The nuclear family is one unto itself. Conversely the multi generational family unit consists of several ages and the individual personality and space requirements. The example of the multi generational house is not for a family matrix of yesterday, rather a contemporary family of today. With the universal bad economic environment and more specifically our own country's economic conditions of the past few years I believe we are returning toward multi generation family unit.

We all know of families with children that can't find employment after college, parents that need close supervision, healthcare and housing. We may have witnessed more than one family sharing one housing unit. These are conditions not to be ashamed of, but rather planned for as the "new norm" in family planning for the home. When we "take in" a family member that we didn't plan for it can and most likely will apply stress to the nuclear family unit. Putting

grandmother into the guest room may be the only alternative; but if there's an option like creating her own "apartment" over the garage, etc. it would be a much better alternative and will allow her the dignity of separation and the privacy she will require. I have worked with this scenario several times and when possible, creating a separate living area for the family member always creates a better long term relationship for all.

Many developments, subdivisions, county building codes, and cities simply don't allow co-housing. Investigate your codes and guidelines carefully prior to the planning stage of this adventure. Always plan for the unexpected, prepare for change, and carefully explore the options presented to us in life. We can't possibly understand or even respond to all of the challenges we can encounter on this journey of life, but we can at least visit most of them with the right attitude. The "what if" factors should always remain in our constant awareness and additionally be explored with a very positive approach in rendering a solution.

Additionally, I will emphasize again that the dream home your family will occupy doesn't have to be expansive or large to accommodate the challenges that I've addressed here. Ask the tough questions of your individual family listen thoroughly to the answers offered by all and respond accordingly. Should the professional design team that you've retained not approach the family unit requirements written in this article and many more, it is your ultimate goal to bring these and more into the design process.

When we approach any task or journey with as much education, knowledge, and understanding of what the task involves and more, we will enjoy our journey. Never, ever surrender to regret! Take the necessary steps to assure success and live in the home your family designed.

Should you have any questions or want to discuss anything further, please do not hesitate to contact me at [www.kenpieper.com](http://www.kenpieper.com)

Until next time enjoy the process!

Ken Pieper

KEN PIEPER AND ASSOCIATES, LLC